Farm Bill 2002

NRCS
Natural Resources Conservation Service
United States Department of Agriculture

Key Points

March 2004

Conservation Innovation Grants

- Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) is a voluntary program intended to stimulate the development and adoption of innovative conservation approaches and technologies while leveraging the Federal investment in environmental enhancement and protection, in conjunction with agricultural production.

- Under CIG, Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) funds are used to award competitive grants to non-Federal governmental or non-governmental organizations, Tribes, or individuals.

- The 2002 Farm Bill authorized CIG under EQIP. Funds made available for CIG come from EQIP. Proposed projects must involve EQIP-eligible producers.

- The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) administers CIG.

- The CIG interim final rule was published in the *Federal Register* on March 29, 2004, with a 60-day comment period.

- A Request for Proposals (RFP) announcing the availability of funds for fiscal year 2004 was published simultaneously in the *Federal Register* and on the Federal government's eGrant portal, www.grants.gov.

- CIG funds are awarded through a nationwide grants competition. CIG applications will be accepted from State or local units of government, Federally-recognized Indian Tribes, non-

governmental organizations, and individuals.

- The National grants competition will emphasize projects that have a goal of providing benefits over a large geographic area. These projects may be watershed based, regional, multi-State, or nationwide in scope. Applications should describe the use of innovative technologies or approaches, or both, to address a natural resource conservation concern or concerns. The natural resource concerns eligible for funding through CIG will be announced in the RFP, and may change annually. The five natural resource concerns for fiscal year 2004 are:
  - Water resources
  - Soil resources
  - Atmospheric resources
  - Grazing land and forest health
  - Wildlife habitat

- Selected applicants may receive grants of up to 50 percent of the total project cost. Applicants must provide non-Federal funding for at least 50 percent of the project cost, of which up to one-half (25 percent of the total project cost) may come from in-kind contributions.

- CIG provides for two programmatic exceptions for historically underserved groups to help ensure that these groups benefit from innovative technologies and approaches.
  - Each year, up to 10 percent of CIG funds may be set aside for applicants who are beginning or limited resource farmers or ranchers, or Tribes, or

community-based organizations comprised of or representing these entities.
  - Matching funds for grants awarded to any of the groups mentioned above may consist of up to 75 percent in-kind contributions.

- Qualified applications will be scored by a peer review panel against the following criteria for proposal evaluation:
  - Purpose and goals
  - Soundness of approach or design
  - Project management
  - Transferability

- Scored applications will be forwarded to an NRCS Grant Review Board, consisting of the Deputy Chief for Programs, Deputy Chief for Science and Technology, Deputy Chief for Soil Survey and Resource Assessment, one Regional Assistant Chief, and one State Conservationist. The Grant Review Board will certify the rankings from the peer review panels, and ensure that the proposal evaluations are consistent with program objectives.

- The Grant Review Board will make recommendations to the Chief for final selections.

For More Information
If you need more information about CIG, please contact Carl Lucero, 5601 Sunnyside Avenue, Mail Stop 5473, Beltsville, MD 20705, phone: (301) 504-2222, fax: (301) 504-2264. E-mails may be sent to: cig@usda.gov. Additional information, including *Federal Register* notices, is available on the World Wide Web at: http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/cig.

Visit USDA on the Web at: http://www.usda.gov/farmbill

Note: This is not intended to be a definitive interpretation of farm legislation. Rather, it is preliminary and may change as USDA develops implementing policies and procedures. Please check back for updates.